

Congresswoman Kosmas Responds to Speaker Pelosi's Comments on Human Spaceflight

Sends Letter to the Speaker Outlining Importance of Space Exploration for Jobs, Science, and Technology

December 18, 2009

(Washington, DC) — Today, Congresswoman Suzanne Kosmas (FL-24) responded to comments made about human spaceflight by Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi. Earlier this week when asked about increased funding for NASA's human spaceflight program, Speaker Pelosi said that she is not "a big fan of manned expeditions to outer space, in terms of safety and cost," and that "a judgment will be made as to what it does in terms of job creation," (Florida Today, 12/17/09).

In response to the comments, Kosmas sent a letter to the Speaker outlining the numerous economic benefits of human spaceflight and highlighting the thousands of jobs that depend on a strong space program.

"Since day one, supporting Kennedy Space Center and NASA's human spaceflight program has been one of my top priorities," said Congresswoman Kosmas. "While we await the Administration's vision and recommendations for the future of the program, I believe I have an obligation to reiterate to the Speaker the numerous benefits that space exploration provides.

"Our human spaceflight program boosts our economy, helps develop countless new technologies, and supports thousands of jobs in Central Florida and across the country. Space exploration is also critical for inspiring this and future generations to excel in science and technology for the 21st Century. I will continue fighting at every turn to ensure a robust human spaceflight program."

In her letter, Kosmas wrote, "I urge you to keep in mind both the tangible and intangible benefits provided by investing in NASA and our nation's human space flight program. There is no question that increased funding for NASA, as recommended by the Review of U.S. Human Space Flight Plans Committee, will help to create and retain highly-skilled, high-paying jobs across the country, including up to 7,000 direct jobs currently at risk in Florida."

The full text of Congresswoman Kosmas's letter can be found below:

Dear Speaker Pelosi:

Given your commitment to fiscal responsibility, job creation, and science, I am writing in response to your comments earlier this week about the need for additional funding for our nation's human space flight program, its impact on jobs, and safety. While I understand your concerns about the costs of space exploration, I urge you to keep in mind both the tangible and intangible benefits provided by investing in NASA and our nation's human spaceflight program.

There is no question that increased funding for NASA, as recommended by the Review of U.S. Human Space Flight Plans Committee, will help to create and retain highly-skilled, high-paying jobs across the country, including up to 7,000 direct jobs currently at risk in Florida. Large and small suppliers, academia, and NASA Centers in nearly every state contribute to our nation's human space flight program. According to the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics (AIAA), the aerospace engineering and manufacturing industry directly employed approximately 650,000 people in 2008, including 200,000 engineers and scientists.

In Florida, NASA's impact is not just limited to those directly employed at the Kennedy Space Center; every direct NASA job translates into 2.82 jobs created statewide. The space program had a total statewide impact of \$4.1 billion in output, \$2.1 billion of household income, and 40,802 jobs in Fiscal Year 2008. Increased funding for NASA will help to maintain and create aerospace and related jobs in Florida and across the country, enabling economic recovery and ensuring we maintain our technological preeminence.

Additionally, it is important to keep in mind the impact of decisions made today on the future of our high-tech workforce. Witnesses at a recent Science and Technology Committee hearing stressed the need for a strong commitment to and stability of funding for human space flight in order to recruit young people into Science, Technology, Math and Engineering (STEM) fields. You have stated that science is one of your top priorities as Speaker and you have shown your commitment through increased funding for science and research and the enactment of the COMPETES initiative.

I urge you to take into account how our nation's human space flight program aligns with these goals and the impact it continues to have in encouraging students to pursue careers in STEM fields. A recent nationwide study of aerospace engineering students conducted by Massachusetts Institute of Technology found that 40 percent of aerospace engineering students specifically cited human space flight as the inspiration to pursue a career in aerospace. While these students may not all end up in the human space flight arena, it is clear that our human spaceflight program has had a positive, disproportionate impact and important influence over those that decide to pursue careers in STEM fields. This contribution was also noted in the report issued by Review of U.S. Human Space Flight Plans Committee.

In his testimony to the Science and Technology Committee, A. Thomas Young, former Director of NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center and currently a Director of Science and Applications International Corporation (SAIC), described the workforce that we have invested in over the decades as "a national treasure" that "has a limited shelf life." If we do not support and continue to develop the workforce in which we have spent decades investing in and building, and which has ensured our national security and technological supremacy, it will be dispersed and very difficult to reassemble or rebuild.

Failing to invest in our human space flight program now will also cause us to be completely reliant upon other countries for access to space and the International Space Station (ISS) for at least 5 years, as the current budget situation dictates. We should not send our constituent's hard-earned dollars overseas; investing in our space flight capabilities and working to reduce the space flight gap will drive our economy and keep highly-skilled, high-paying jobs here at home.

Finally, just as the Apollo, Shuttle and Space Station programs have lead to new technologies that improve the lives of every American, so too will the next generation human space flight program. Innovations developed for journeys to the moon, Mars, or asteroids will no doubt help us to address important issues facing our nation through the development of new forms of alternative energy and improvement of medical and communications technologies.

Increased funding for NASA will preserve and create high-tech jobs across our nation, help to mitigate the impending space flight gap, and ensure our nation's continued leadership in space and technology. I urge you to join me in supporting a robust human space flight program that will provide long-lasting scientific, technological and economic benefits for our nation.

Sincerely,

Suzanne M. Kosmas

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